



Testimony in Support of HB 2461

February 3, 2021

House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness

Deborah Riddick JD, RN

Good afternoon Chair Evans, Vice Chairs Lewis and Meek, and members of the committee. My name is Deborah Riddick. I am the Director of Public Policy & Government Relations for the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA). We represent 15,000 registered nurses throughout the state, as well as our member organization, the Nurse Practitioners of Oregon. The ONA membership strongly supports HB 2461, which would ensure that Oregon maintains a robust stock of emergency supplies and equipment by establishing an Oregon Critical Disaster Preparedness Stockpile program.

Our ongoing COVID pandemic experience has tragically illuminated gaps in our emergency preparedness capabilities, particularly in its lack of reasonable PPE protections for our nurses and other frontline workers. It became painfully clear last spring, that our nursing workforce needed to adopt less than optimal standards to meet the needs of their patients, while exposing themselves to unforeseen danger, due in part to an enormous failure to maintain PPE stockpiles. What they, and we, believed to be a short-term strategy continues nearly a year later. And while it was necessary to focus on what was possible and practical in the early months, this lack of preparation left nurses, throughout the state, without the protections they and their patients deserve. They have been traumatized by the reality that they are helpless to protect themselves and are angry that those in charge at the state and industry levels have neglected to protect them. In spite of this, our nurses have continued to provide a disproportionate share of services and care in nearly every health care setting throughout the state. It is our nurses, and other healthcare providers, expertise and infection management capabilities that continue to keep a more lethal surge at bay. HB 2461 is a proactive approach to emergency preparedness that limits uncertainty and better prepares our health care system for future catastrophic events.

Our members are in unanimous support of increasing PPE stockpiles through local manufacturing which would enable the state to better monitor, regulate, and distribute essential PPE in the future so that nursing professionals, and other health care staff, never have to unnecessarily risk their lives, in order to safeguard ours. Because our members are collectively at greatest risk, we are adamant in defending their position. This is literally life and death for them and their families. Anxieties and frustrations are running high, while patience and trust are waning. This is not a good combination and requires your immediate support and resolution of these concerns to help manage further deterioration of this vital workforce. Adequate PPE stockpiles are a reasonable cost of doing business and, due to COVID, a predictable necessity. Oregon nurses need legislative action, not public statements and accolades. Pass HB 2461 and demonstrate your commitment for the sacrifices they have made.



Our members must know that their immediate, real-life concerns about exposure, lack of collaboration on working conditions, containment efforts, and financial support are as important as your members financial stability.

Understand that the stipulations listed are but a fraction of the reasonable asks we've considered. I hope that your membership can balance what's truly at stake before rejecting what our collective workforce has put before them as non-negotiables.